

PAUL RICOEUR'S *ONESELF AS ANOTHER* AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY*

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THE PROPOSAL for the construction of a practical theology has consistently struggled in the past with the relationship of practical theology to theoretical or speculative theology and to an appropriate ontology. Since practice could not be grounded in pure agency, it was thought, it could only flow out of something substantive in the manner of the old adage *agere sequitur esse*. Usually *esse* was understood as a substantive being, that is, a something. Only this "something" was considered capable of anchoring human action. In a similar manner, systematic theology was thought to secure the foundations for practical theology. In order to rethink the relationship of the practical to the theoretical, and particularly of human praxis to being, it is worth reviewing some of the efforts in current hermeneutical philosophy to recast practical philosophy. In this article I will confine myself to an analysis of the most recent work of Paul Ricoeur, particularly *Oneself as Another*,¹ a work highly representative of such a renewed practical philosophy. I will give a somewhat extended review of the book as an introduction to the themes of a reconstructed practical theology. Only in the final part will I weigh the consequences of this effort for theology.

Oneself as Another is vintage Paul Ricoeur. Like all his previous books and articles, it is part of an intricate dialogue with the philosophical community and indirectly with the theological community—or perhaps more accurately with the Judaeo-Christian tradition within an ecumenical culture. The theme of this present dialogue is the place of practical philosophy in a time of a shattered Cartesian "cogito."² What happens to human action and suffering in a time when the human subject seems to have lost its confidence in determining what is to be done? For this reason the concern of a practical philosophy has become the question of selfhood in all its obviousness, as in the ques-

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¹ Translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago, 1992), a translation of *Soi-même comme un autre*, *L'ordre philosophique*, Collection dirigée par François Wahl (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

² *Oneself as Another* 11.

tion "Who am I?", or in all its opaqueness, as in the question "What is the 'I'?" or "What is the self?" Ricoeur first presented these studies as the influential Gifford Lectures in 1986 under the title *On Selfhood: The Question of Personal Identity*. The Gifford Lectures have frequently provided a forum for thinkers on the issues that matter. Ricoeur quite clearly wished to elaborate his position on what he perceives to be one of the dominant culture issues of our time.³

THE ROLE OF THE SELF AND ACTION IN A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

The two major themes of a practical philosophy, according to Ricoeur, are the human self and human action. *Oneself as Another* examines both themes in depth and indicates how their interaction forms the thrust of a new practical philosophy.

At the level of the self, this is an exploration of an option, a third way, between two major philosophical traditions of the West. Both traditions have succeeded as ideological movements—in the nonpejorative sense that Ricoeur has attached to the concept of ideology⁴—that is, as systems of interacting symbols that regulate and govern the actions of individuals to form a society in an institutional framework. For Ricoeur the central cultural issue is not the one designated by Dilthey, namely, the scientific, technological approach to reality versus a humanistic, hermeneutical approach. Ricoeur had earlier demonstrated their vaunted dichotomous relationship to be false.⁵ Understanding, he has insisted all along, cannot exist separately from explanation. C. P. Snow's two cultures need each other. The cultural crisis is not a crisis of methods but a crisis of the self-identity of the human. The ideological protagonists for Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another* are not the empiricists or the logical positivists but two traditions which in Ricoeur's terms either "exalt" the subject too highly or "hu-

³ Ricoeur retains something tentative about his approach to practical philosophy. *Oneself as Another* consists of ten "studies" (not chapters), eight of which were part of the original Gifford Lectures. Also the final chapter reveals the same tentativeness: "What Ontology in View?" The studies which were eliminated from the text of *Oneself as Another* contained an analysis of the self in the biblical text and the "called self" in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The final lecture has been published under the title "Le sujet convoqué: A l'école des récits de vocations prophétique," *Revue de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* 28 (1988) 83–99.

⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, "La raison pratique," in *Rationality Today/La rationalité aujourd'hui*, ed Theodore Geraets (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1979) 231; "Herméneutique et critique des idéologies," *Archivio di filosofia* 43 (1973) 25–61.

⁵ One of the principal contributions which Ricoeur has made to hermeneutical philosophy is his positing of a dialectical relationship of understanding and explanation. It is his major point of divergence from Heidegger and Gadamer who perceive explanation as alienation. See "Qu'est-ce qu'un texte? Expliquer et comprendre," in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik* vol. 2, ed. Rüdiger Bubner et al. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970) 181–200.

miliate" the subject to the point of its disappearance or death.⁶ The protagonists of these traditions are Descartes (perhaps more accurately the Cartesian tradition articulated by thinkers such as Kant and Husserl) and Nietzsche and the other more recent philosophers of suspicion, especially the deconstructionists.

But protagonists remain partners in dialogue for Ricoeur. They carry forward a truth which they themselves may have left unsaid but which reveals itself in the contest and conflict of interpretations. Ricoeur is not a consensual thinker like Gadamer who believes that dialogue ought to lead to *Einverständnis*. Ricoeur believes in clashes of interpretation, in metaphorical twists, that battle towards new meaning. In pitting the Cartesian tradition of the transcendental ego, where the I as consciousness is absolute ground, against the deconstructionist tradition, where the subject is only a linguistic or rhetorical flourish, Ricoeur wants to act as a midwife. Both these traditions, he tells us, are children with an ancient ancestry. The ancestors of this conflict are Plato and Aristotle and their articulation of the primordial, philosophical antinomy of the Same and the Other.⁷

Ricoeur thinks that the conflict between the transcendental ego and the rhetorical "ego" can be made productive because their clash reveals a new truth about the human self and the mode of being of the human. This innovation becomes manifest in the interaction of these two traditions, exposing their latent meaning. In Ricoeur's philosophical oeuvre this conflict is not new. In fact, he has grappled with the issue of the human subject from the beginning of his philosophical career.⁸ The human subject, he acknowledged in a recent interview, dominates his philosophical preoccupation.⁹ It derives from his earliest training in

⁶ *Oneself as Another* 16.

⁷ *Ibid.* 298. See, e.g., his remarks in an early article: "And yet we have no other access to this *One* than the debate of one philosophy with another. What is in question in every question, what gives rise to the question—the *Being* preliminary to the questioning—is also the *One* of history; but this *One* is neither a particular philosophy that is allegedly eternal, nor the source of philosophies, nor the identity of what they affirm, nor becoming as an immanent law of philosophical 'moments' nor the 'absolute knowledge' of this becoming" ("The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth," in *History and Truth: Essays in Phenomenology*, trans. and ed. Ch. Kelbley [Evanston: Northwestern University, 1965] 53–54).

⁸ See my book, *The Home of Meaning: The Hermeneutics of the Subject in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982). The same position is held by Domenico Jervolino in his *Il Cogito e l'ermeneutica: La questione del soggetto in Ricoeur* (Naples: G. Procaccini, 1984).

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "De la volonté à l'acte: Un entretien de Paul Ricoeur avec Carlos Oliviera," in "*Temps et récit*" de Paul Ricoeur en débat, ed. Ch. Bouchindhomme and R. Rochlitz (Paris: Cerf, 1990) 21.

French reflexive¹⁰ and existential philosophies, made rigorously explanatory by Husserl's phenomenology, and later reconceptualized through Heidegger and Gadamer's hermeneutics.¹¹ From his earliest writings he sought to use the conflict between Descartes's subject as radical origin and the deconstructed subject of the masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, to construct a middle position. He was convinced that the Cartesian subject must be dislodged from its cultural hegemony.¹² Throughout his philosophical career he promoted this decentering of the subject as master and sought to make the human subject not the first but the final category of a theory of understanding.¹³ Subjectivity or the appropriation of the self lies not at the origin of the human venture, but it is an endless task of understanding accomplished only after painful critiques of the self. Ricoeur has continually proposed a more modest self who does not possess the self, and he has maintained that, though the subject does not possess the self, it retains the possibility of authenticity.

But Ricoeur had not as yet analyzed in detail the ontology of the self: who or what this self might be that emerges as a new possibility after the "shattered" exaltation of Descartes's subject and the demeaned, empty, Nietzschean subject. This is what he undertakes to do in *Oneself as Another*. The mission is delicate. What emerges must be a self that is no longer foundational or cares to be the first datum. Following Nietzsche, he insists that this self must be an "interpreted" self. But if the I is no longer foundational to meaning, who or what is the I? Is there still a ground for the I? And if the I is only an interpreted I, what is to be interpreted? Or, perhaps, there is no ground at all and we must proclaim with the deconstructionists the end of the self?

It is to these questions that Ricoeur addresses the major part of *Oneself as Another*. The studies reflect a shift in the orientation of

¹⁰ See the informative article of P. Colin, "Herméneutique et philosophie réflexive," in *Paul Ricoeur: Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, 1er-11 août, 1988, ed. Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney (Paris: Cerf, 1991) 15-36.

¹¹ See e.g., *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers: Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe* (Paris: Temps présent, 1948); "Étude sur les 'Méditations Cartésiennes' de Husserl," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 52 (1954) 75-109; "Phénoménologie existentielle," *Encyclopédie française XIX*, Philosophie et Religion (Paris: Larousse, 1957) 19.10-8 to 19.10-12; "L'acte et le signe selon Jean Nabert," *Les études philosophiques (Jean Nabert)* 17 (1962) 339-49; and "Herméneutique et réflexion," *Archivio di filosofia* 32 (1962) 19-34.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, "Existence herméneutique," in *Interpretation der Welt*, Festschrift für Romano Guardini zum achtzigsten Geburtstag, ed. H. Kuhn et al. (Würzburg: Echter, 1965) 32-51.

¹³ "La raison pratique" 235.

Ricoeur's most recent work. Until the early 1980s his orientation in hermeneutics had been mainly theoretical. His hermeneutical endeavors had searched out the relation of explanation and understanding in texts, the functioning of metaphorical language, the structuring and mimesis of action in fictional and narrative text, and the configuration of human and cosmic temporality in narrative. But this very work on narrativity in the 1980s brought him back to practical philosophy, the topic that had engaged him off and on since the writing of his doctoral dissertation. The dissertation, entitled *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*,¹⁴ was intended as a practical phenomenology modelled on Merleau-Ponty's perceptual phenomenology. At the time he called it a philosophy of the will. In the 1980s he broke this earlier linkage with a faculty psychology and its philosophy of the will and addressed human action.¹⁵ This is best exemplified in a groundbreaking article of 1971 entitled "The Model of a Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text."¹⁶ In it he acknowledged a finding of Ordinary Language Philosophy that human discourse is an action, and inversely that human action is meaningful action, that is, "une action parlante."¹⁷ Although this move in no way revoked Ricoeur's interest in language, it rearranges the field that language is asked to display.¹⁸ In his most recent writings, in other words, Ricoeur has placed language within the more encompassing framework of action.¹⁹

Ricoeur devotes the bulk of *Oneself as Another* to a detailed examination of the various complexes of human action. He explores in succession the most recent writings on: the semantics of action, the pragmatics of action, ascription of action, the mimesis of action in narrative, ethical and political praxis, and practical wisdom. This analytic of

¹⁴ Originally planned as a tripartite *Philosophie de la volonté*, the first volume is a practical phenomenology patterned on Merleau-Ponty's more theoretical phenomenology of perception. It is translated as *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Northwestern Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, trans E. V. Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1966).

¹⁵ See the interview with the telling title "De la volonté à l'acte: Un entretien de Paul Ricoeur avec Carlos Oliviera," in *"Temps et récit" de Paul Ricoeur en débat* 17–36.

¹⁶ *Social Research* 38 (1971) 529–62.

¹⁷ "Praxéologie pastorale, herméneutique et identité," in *Interprétation, un défi de l'action pastorale*, Actes du colloque 1987 du groupe de recherche en études pastorales avec la collaboration de Paul Ricoeur, Cahiers d'Études pastorales VI, ed. Jean-Guy Nadeau (Montréal: Fides, 1989) 267.

¹⁸ *Oneself as Another* 301.

¹⁹ This is how he characterizes his move from text to action in "Praxéologie pastorale" 267. It is also reflected in the title of a collection of articles *Du texte à l'action: Essais d'herméneutique II*, ed. Olivier Mongin, Collection Esprit (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

action in *Oneself as Another* is gathered under three headings: the description of action, the prescription of action, and the narration of action. Under the heading of description Ricoeur collects the rich and varied data of the semantics and pragmatics of action drawn from the theory of language of Ordinary Language Philosophy²⁰ and the theory of action of the pragmatists. Under the heading of prescription he culls from Aristotle's practical philosophy and from Kant's practical reason a type of human action that is ethical, moral, and political. Under the heading of narration he recapitulates his narrative theory. In *Temps et récit* Ricoeur had presented narrative as an imitation of human action. In *Oneself as Another* he proposes that narrated action mediates the descriptive and prescriptive actions. The narrating of human action results in a *mimesis praxeos*, a configuration of human action in a temporal mode. Narrative links the great varieties of human action, described by Ordinary Language Philosophy and pragmatism into the imagination "emplotments"²¹ of narrative schemata. Because the emplotment of human action is capable of describing the various possibilities of human action but also of displaying how actions are imputed to individuals and can become prescriptive, narrative is for Ricoeur like a propaedeutic to ethics. Accordingly, "literature is a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgments of approval and condemnation" of human actions.²²

Narratives, however, only display the polysemy of action. Ricoeur remains aware that he has not yet discovered thereby what binds together the variety of human action that displays itself in the practices of human language. The constative or illocutionary discourse of action of Ordinary Language Philosophy, the "basic actions" of Danto, the practices or skills of the tradesperson or artisan, the chain of human actions forming a praxis, interaction, the social rule of action, and responsible and political action form, according to Ricoeur, an "analogical unity of action."²³ As the variety of discourses of action indi-

²⁰ Despite his critique of Ordinary Language Philosophy, Ricoeur pays high tribute to its contribution to the theory of action. Not only does it provide a rich description of the various ways that human beings describe or articulate action, but it has moved beyond the descriptive to the prescriptive in its analyses of promissives. In this manner Ordinary Language Philosophy has made a contribution to ethics by providing the constitutive linguistic rules of promises, counsels, imperatives. See also "De la volonté à l'acte" 25.²¹ Ricoeur used the term "emplotment" rather than "plot" to signify that the plot of a narrative is a creative production of action, hence an emplotment of action.

²² *Oneself as Another* 115. This relation of narrative to the ethical enterprise has been a recurrent theme in Ricoeur's narrative theory. See *Time and Narrative* vol. 1, chap. 2, and vol. 3, chap. 8 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988).

²³ *Oneself as Another* 303.

cate, there is not an univocal approach to action. Phenomenologically action is displayed in the many ways the human self is implicated in different actions. The unity among these ways is only analogical. There is no one action that can be used as the key to the understanding of the other modes of action. Action is polysemic. That is the reason why, in the final study, Ricoeur looks for an ontology that might support such a polysemy.

But before such an ontology might be considered, it is important to recognize in Ricoeur's theory of action reasons for such an ontology which would bring together the self and action.

Let us begin with the anomaly in action theory which Ricoeur exploits adroitly to provide him with a springboard for a dialectic of the self. In Ordinary Language Philosophy and in the theory of action of D. Davidson, actions tend to be approached as events.²⁴ In the current theories of action Ricoeur notes the tendency to favor an approach to action that explains the "What?" of action by answering the "Why?" Accordingly, actions are understood through the intentions or "reasons for" action. Ricoeur has no difficulty in accepting the feasibility and the advantage of this approach. But he does not advocate giving priority to the question "What?" of action. If it is the "Why?" of action that designates an action as action, the primary focus of action must not be sought outside of the agent in some type of neutral "What?" zone. Ricoeur's theory of action privileges therefore the agent (the "Who?") of action.

Ricoeur demonstrates this priority of the "Who?" over the "What?" of action through a study of the linguistic expressions of intentionality. Intentional action has three grammatical forms: (1) "I do or have done something intentionally," (2) "I do something with the intention that . . .", and (3) "I have the intention to . . .". The first two forms, the adverbial intention and intention expressed in the present tense, refer to an intentional action that has already been undertaken or is in the process of being done. In this state an action is observable and becomes available as an event, albeit only as an intentional event. It is tempting to privilege this observable aspect over what manifests itself in the third form, "I have the intention to . . .". This verbal expression refers to actions that one intends to perform. These linguistic forms are identified by Ordinary Language Philosophy as commissives. I commit myself to do something that is still future. With language the self projects itself into the future, committing the self to a future action in accordance with a word given in the present. Since this action is still

²⁴ See D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980). As will be shown below, Ricoeur brings a highly significant corrective to this approach.

future, it is not observable, it is not yet an event. In the present it is a speech-event, a word to be kept. In this expression of intentionality the focus falls fully upon the agent, the "Who?" of action. Since the commissive or promissive projects the self of the agent into an open future, the self emerges here in a context of action whereby, through the kept word (*la parole tenue*), the self attests to itself as a project and not as a possession. It is this projected self that is the touchstone of Ricoeur's reflections on the human self. In a similar manner, this projected action or initiative²⁵ must be considered the paradigm of human action.

It is for this reason that the core question of Ricoeur's theory of action is "Who?": Who speaks? Who acts? Who narrates? Who is the responsible subject of action?²⁶ In other words, the "Who?" question of the theory of action becomes the model through which Ricoeur progressively develops his position regarding the self or human identity. As in his previous approaches to the self, such as the finite self in *Fallible Man*²⁷ or to the sublimated self in *Freud and Philosophy*,²⁸ Ricoeur foreswears an introspective route to the self. The human self is not an immediate self-possession. The nontransparent self of self-understanding becomes available only piecemeal and through arduous work of mediation. In *Oneself as Another* the explanatory mediation of the self is derived from the theory of action in its various fields of application.²⁹

Ricoeur, therefore, has no difficulty in incorporating the position of Ordinary Language Philosophy. The latter's emphasis on the "What?" of action by way of the "Why?" is perceived by Ricoeur as the necessary detour or mediation to arrive at the identity of the agent (the "Who?"). For him the analysis of action through intentionality (action as an event) opens the way for an indirect or mediated understanding of the agent of action. In this manner the priority in the theory of action given to the agent (the "Who?") is attained only after an explanatory

²⁵ *Oneself as Another* 101–11; see also "L'initiative," in *Du texte à l'action* 261–77.

²⁶ *Oneself as Another* 16.

²⁷ As an interpretation of human fallibility, *Fallible Man* approached the self as finitude, as the in-between or disproportion in the theoretical, practical, and affective spheres between the transcendent reach for truth and happiness and their finite appropriations. See Ricoeur, *L'homme fallible*, Philosophie d'esprit (Paris: Aubier, 1960); Eng. trans. by Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965).

²⁸ P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. D. Savage (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1970). The self in *Freud and Philosophy* is mediated by the interpretation of oneiric symbols.

²⁹ *Oneself as Another* 16, 299–302. See P. Ricoeur, "Explanation and Understanding," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Steward (Boston: Beacon, 1978) 149–66.

approach to action, such as that provided by Ordinary Language Philosophy, has been undertaken. The human self is appropriated by way of an analysis of the "What?" and the "Why?" of action.

It is in this manner that Ricoeur arrives at a practical philosophy whose primary concern is the identity and constitution of the human self.

THE THREEFOLD DIALECTIC OF THE SELF

Having established the relationship of action and the self, Ricoeur asks, "Who or what is this self mediated by human action?" He has already indicated that this self is not synonymous with the "I." It is the self such as we find it expressed in the reflexive indefinite form of the predicate (e.g. to conduct *oneself*). Only secondarily does it become the self in the first person singular (myself) or in the other personal pronouns. It is not the solipsistic self or the ego. What, then, is the framework within which the self is constituted? In the final study Ricoeur begins—somewhat tentatively—to build an ontological framework of the self which is not metaphysical, that is, not substantive. The ontology of the self which can encompass the amplitude of the question "Who?" is constructed by a threefold dialectic.³⁰

The first dialectic we have touched on above. According to Ricoeur, the self is mediated by a dialectic of explanation and understanding. The self is only mediately available. Hence he insists that access to the self demands the effort of working through the analytical explanations of the self. As we saw above, Ricoeur's explanation of the self is derived from Ordinary Language Philosophy, pragmatics, and narratology. There is no understanding of the self without using explanatory procedures.³¹ The self is not intuitively obtained through introspection, but only via the long detour of the traces of the self. For Ricoeur this dialectic is ontologically rooted. I shall return to this below.

The second dialectic concerns the identity of the self. Ricoeur perceives the identity of the self as constituted between "sameness" (*idem*) and "ipseity" (*ipse*). The operation of this dialectic can best be demonstrated in the narrative. Narratives, as we saw above, configure human actions. But they also configure temporality. In the narrative development of the personages, narratives account for human existence in a temporal mode. Human identity is shown to be a temporal

³⁰ *Oneself as Another* 297.

³¹ Ricoeur has limited explanation to linguistic explanation. Our research project "Hermeneutics and Psychology" with Paul O'Grady and Paul Rigby has sought to broaden explanation to include the social sciences and the experimental method. See our "Cognitive Linguistic Psychology and Hermeneutics," *Man and World* 22 (1989) 43–70.

process. From the narrative character development Ricoeur derives a theory of the internal dialectic of the human self. In the narrative there is an interaction of a self that, on the one hand, maintains an identity of constancy (a self that remains the same, hence "sameness"), with a self that, on the other hand, projects itself into the future and commits itself to change and transformation (a self that is not yet but becomes in the "kept word," which Ricoeur calls "ipseity.")³² The human self is constituted precisely in this dialectic of sameness and ipseity. The self develops in a process, on the one hand, of actions that have "sedimented" themselves in what Ricoeur calls the human character. Here the self displays a consistency, a constancy, a substantive identity, which endures as something that can be identified again and again as being the same. On the other hand, he or she also undertakes actions which are innovative or initiatives. The human person is not only a settled self. At the level of ipseity the self's authenticity consists in remaining truthful to the self by keeping a given word. The self is determined by actions which we have described above as commissives or promissives. In projected actions the identity is not substantive but as fragile as the promise given to another. Narratives configure this dialectic through the concordance—discordance of the plot. The dialectical identity of the self of the narrative personage is displayed at the moment of the "change of fortune." This is the moment in which the sedimented self is confronted with a new opportunity or crisis. In the capacity of the personage to respond with a new initiative, committing him or her to new possibilities, the self is shown as being more than inflexible constancy. It becomes other without losing personal identity, that is, it becomes itself without in some manner remaining the same. Hence, Ricoeur identifies the self as a dialectic of "sameness" and "ipseity." Also the dialectic is rooted in an ontology which we will identify below with Spinoza's *conatus*, the desire and effort to be.

The third dialectic constituting human identity or the self is between the self and the other. For Ricoeur this dialectic is by far the most encompassing.³³ It was important enough for it to give rise to the title of the book. It readdresses the perennial philosophical theme of the Same and the Other. Here the dialectical opposite of the self is not the temporal sameness or constancy of the human character, but the other in its various guises. The other, or alterity, to which Ricoeur refers is the "variety of experiences of passivity, intertwined in multiple ways in human action."³⁴ This reference to the other and passivity brings into play a trait of action not yet considered up to this point

³² *Oneself as Another* 116–123.

³³ *Ibid.* 298.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 318.

and which plays a role in the dialectical relationship with the other. This dimension of action is once again best exemplified in narratives. In narratives actions encompass not only interactions or actions in common but also passions, that is, actions which are undergone or suffered. Every power to act is simultaneously a power "over." This power over things or, in political communities, over people is "grafted upon the initial dissymmetry between that which one does and that which is done to the other."³⁵ Whether this power "over" takes the form of gentle persuasion or the barbarity of torture, it is clear that every power to act, even the power to act "with," must take account of the power "over." Human agency affects the other. As Ricoeur says, "every action has its agents and its patients."³⁶

In every engagement of the other this action/passion is at play. This has repercussions both ethically and ontologically. We cannot think of agency as a power without taking account of the other or of suffering action (passion). Ontologically, however, Ricoeur seeks to bring together the self and the other into the fragile structure of a self which is neither a foundation nor an illusion. This fragile ontological structure of the self is based upon a threefold experience of passivity or alterity.³⁷

The first other of the self is found in the experience of one's own body. The body is "my body" or "ownmost body," that is, a non-objectifiable thing, which mediates between the self and the world.³⁸ One's own body is enigmatic: it participates both in the self and in the world. Persons are bodies but bodies also belong to the realm of things. In this sense selfhood implies an alterity in the very fact that self is both, in Husserl's language, flesh (for me) and a body (for others).

The second other or passivity is the intersubjective other. In the dialectic of the self as sameness and ipseity Ricoeur has found a way of unbalancing Husserl's and Levinas's diametrically opposed approaches to the other. The other as another "flesh," another "I" (Husserl), or as radical exteriority (Levinas), is transformed in Ricoeur's philosophy into a self of reciprocity or dialogue.³⁹ I know the other to be another self in the ethical response that the other enjoins on me. In this sense the self is responsibility to and by the other.⁴⁰

And finally the third other is the other within, a passivity disclosed in the relation of indebtedness to oneself identified as conscience. The other of conscience, as a "voice" within me, is a primary power through

³⁵ Ibid. 256.

³⁷ Ibid. 318.

³⁹ Ibid. 338.

³⁶ Ibid. 155.

³⁸ Ibid. 319-29.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 329-41.

which the self attests to itself.⁴¹ In other words, the other in its various guises is not extraneous to the self. In the relation to the world the body is not the radically other, because it is "my" body, a personal body, and not an object. Even Levinas's radically exterior other, the stranger who enjoins me not to kill, nestles within the self as responsibility, that is, as an ability, even a necessity, to respond. The same applies to the "voice" of conscience. In all these instances the self stands in dialectical relationship to the other, which an ontology of the self will seek to keep in fragile balance.

RICOEUR'S PRACTICAL ONTOLOGY

If an ontology of the self is so precariously perched on a threefold dialectic, what sort of ontology undergirds this practical philosophy? Is there an ontology of action/passion supporting this more modest self? What is the mode of being of selfhood? In the final study of *Oneself as Another* and in a number of articles⁴² Ricoeur has attempted to arrive at an ontological framework of human action leading to a new hermeneutic of the self beyond Descartes and Nietzsche.⁴³

In his ontology Ricoeur has consistently refused to accept the direct ontology of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. He has refused to dichotomize the epistemological and the ontological.⁴⁴ That applies as well to his practical ontology. It is both epistemological and ontological. He asks whether, between the transcendental ego of the Cartesian tradition and the rhetorical, interpreted subject of deconstructionism, there is an epistemological status for the self? And to what ontology is such an epistemological self inclined? It has become obvious from Heidegger's critique of metaphysics that this philosophy cannot be fitted into a traditional substantialist metaphysics. In the dialectic of sameness

⁴¹ Ibid. 341–55.

⁴² See, e.g., "Entre éthique et ontologie: La disponibilité," in *Gabriel Marcel, Textes réunies par M. Sacquin* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1989) 157–65, 192–200; "Approches de la personne," *Esprit* 160 (mars-avril 1990) 115–30; "L'Attestation: Entre phénoménologie et ontologie," in *Paul Ricoeur: Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, ed. Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney (Paris: Cerf, 1991) 381–403.

⁴³ The texture of this ontology is prepared by the very structure of *Oneself as Another*. The book is fragmentary and tentative. It shows in the refusal of Ricoeur to call the ten parts of the book chapters. They are studies, fragmentary approaches to human action. It shows, too, in his decision to call the introductory section a preface, as if it is only provisionally connected with the text. It also shows in the fragmentation of the approach to the self; the self is not an unbreachable simplicity. It shows, finally, in the extreme care to call his final study only an exploration; it carries the tentative title "What Ontology in View?" ("Vers quelle ontologie?").

⁴⁴ See, e.g., "Ontologie," in *Encyclopaedia universalis* (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis France, 1972) 12.94–102.

and ipseity, only sameness, not ipseity, can be linked with Being as substance. Is there an ontology for selfhood where the self is not in danger of being reduced to a "something"?

Attestation as the Mode of Being of Ipseity

Ricoeur begins by asking whether, after the shattering of the Cartesian cogito by the assaults of deconstructionism, there is any room left for an epistemology. If the ego is no longer the radical origin or foundation, what role does the human self play in relation to the world or, to put it otherwise, in the ascertaining of truth? Has truth become a vain quest? Ricoeur reexamines Descartes's subject and the thrust of the subject toward the truthfulness of the world. Descartes's subject needed to be absolutely certain in its knowledge about reality in the face of a deceptive evil genie. To achieve this certainty, Descartes had to resort to the guarantee of God's veracity, verified by the proofs for the existence of God. For Descartes the human subject was to be the point of origin and the guarantor of the certainty of knowledge. The bias in Descartes's position, according to Ricoeur, lies in his need for a guarantee, for verification. Ricoeur overcomes this bias toward guaranteed certainty by an innovative rereading of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.⁴⁵ Aristotle determined "to be true" and "to be false" as one of the original meanings of being. "To be true" and "to be false" is a mode of being. Ontologically this mode of being is not necessarily only cognitive. Heidegger, for instance, reread it as "authenticity," or "authentic existence," and as "forgetfulness." Although Ricoeur accepts this understanding of truth (in which, ultimately, truth is understood as a doing), he refuses to detach from it an epistemological mission.

The speaker of a language and the agent of action both make a commitment to the real that takes them beyond themselves. In a constative proposition a speaker affirms "This is so." Similarly in a commissive proposition an agent attest "This I can do." Ricoeur calls this reaching out beyond the self the "ontological vehemence"⁴⁶ of the speaker and agent. This ontological vehemence is an affirmation not only about reality and about the world of action but also a mode of existence of selfhood. Ricoeur names this mode of existence "attestation."

Ricoeur reinterprets here the Aristotelian modes of being "to be true" and "to be false" as "attestation" and "suspicion."⁴⁷ Attestation expresses being. But it is more than an epistemic thrust. Attestation

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 6.2.1026a32–62.

⁴⁶ *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 310–21.

⁴⁷ *Oneself as Another* 299.

makes this referential thrust a clear commitment of the self. Against the deconstructionists Ricoeur maintains that, despite the lack of an absolute guarantee of truth, there is a confidence—an unverifiable confidence—in the self, in what the self says, and in what the self believes it can do.⁴⁸ The self, in other words, exists as a belief, as a “*fiance*,” as an assurance of truthfulness. Ricoeur calls it a “*mode aléthique*,” a truthful mode, which expresses not so much “I believe that . . .” but, as in the credal formula, “I believe in . . .”. This truth, Ricoeur insists, is not psychological but epistemological.⁴⁹ In this sense attestation resembles witnessing, inasmuch as in witnessing the equilibrium is easily disturbed by doubt and suspicion cast upon it by more progressive theories, other actions and stories, other ethical or moral predicates.⁵⁰ But in attestation the self expresses the assurance that, in spite of suspicion, meaning and the self are possible. Truth here is not necessarily verifiable truth. Attestation is the self in its commitment to the world. Attestation is the self as Care. The self exists, in other words, as an attestation of the truthfulness of being. In attestation one expresses the confidence that everyone exists as a self.

Ontology of the Self: Towards a New Practical Philosophy

But how is this self of attestation grounded? The second task which Ricoeur gave himself in *Oneself as Another* was to anchor this more modest self in an appropriate ontology of action and passion. If the self's dialectical existence is not to be dispersed into an irremediable emptiness, it must be rooted ontologically. Traditional metaphysics is at a loss to ground the self because it is too solidly rooted in Being as substance or presence. But the self in its dialectical constitution of sameness and ipseity is only in part—at the level of sameness—a something. Only as sameness is the self rooted in substantialist being. As ipseity the self is not a something but a projection. For that reason, with Heidegger, Gadamer, and Riedel,⁵¹ Ricoeur seeks a nonsubstantialist concept of Being. This is not a shift in Ricoeur's thinking, however. From his earliest writings he has maintained that Being must not be allowed to be exhausted by substance and form. Already then he described being as act, the “living affirmation, the power of existing and of making exist.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid. 22.

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “L'Attestation: Entre phénoménologie et ontologie” 382.

⁵⁰ *Oneself as Another* 299.

⁵¹ Manfred Riedel, *Für eine zweite Philosophie: Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988).

⁵² “Negativity and Primary Affirmation,” in *History and Truth* 328.

What is new in *Oneself as Another* is his justification of such an ontology. He constructs this ontology in a manner that those who are acquainted with Ricoeur will recognize immediately as his trademark. In line with his understanding of a hermeneutics of historical consciousness,⁵³ he proposes a rereading of the great ontological tradition. He believes that in this tradition potentials of meaning lie unused, hidden, at time repressed. These, he maintains, can be tapped or liberated to actualize themselves in new circumstances. Traditions can be creatively reactivated.⁵⁴ Ricoeur is thinking here specifically of Aristotle's metaphysics, even though in Aristotle's theory of the soul, the self was left unsaid. He searches in Aristotle's understanding of *ousia* and the categories for an ontology that is not exclusively substantialist. He finds it in Aristotle's treatment of action and potency as a mode of being.⁵⁵ He notices an ambiguity in Aristotle's circular definition of action by potency. With the help of the work of Rémi Brague, he demonstrates that these ambiguities are best answered by reading Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* as an actualization of Aristotle's practical philosophy, more particularly of Aristotle's concepts of *dynamis* and *energeia*.⁵⁶ With his notion of *Dasein* Heidegger succeeded where Aristotle failed in tying temporality to an ontology. In Heidegger's immensely enriching actualization of Aristotle's practical philosophy the self is correlative to Being-in-the-world. Heidegger's *Selbst* is an existential, *Dasein*, an openness to the world or a "relation of total concern."⁵⁷ The self can only be such an openness if one recognizes in initiative "a specific coordination with the movements of the world and all the physical aspects of action."⁵⁸ Heidegger had opposed this *Selbst* to that which is available, that is *Vorhanden* or *Zuhanden*. The self is not a thing, a *Selbst-ständigkeit*. This opposition of *Selbst/Vorhanden* is quite close to Ricoeur's dialectic of ipseity/sameness.⁵⁹ As stated

⁵³ I am referring specifically to Ricoeur's proposal for a dialectic in history of the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. It is this dialectic which, according to Ricoeur, opens up new possibilities of initiatives in the present. See the chapter "Towards a Hermeneutics of Historical Consciousness," in *Time and Narrative* 3. 207–40.

⁵⁴ This is a theme that he worked out at length in *Time and Narrative* 3.216–29.

⁵⁵ *Oneself as Another* 302–17.

⁵⁶ This re-actualization of Aristotle by Heidegger has come to light in the recent publication of Heidegger's *Frühe Freiburger Vorlesungen*. These lectures were given by Heidegger between 1919 and 1923, that is, before the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927). See M. Heidegger, *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, Gesamtausgabe, Teil 63 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988).

⁵⁷ See Rémi Brague, *Aristote et al question du monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988) 333.

⁵⁸ *Oneself as Another* 309.

⁵⁹ "L'Attestation: Entre phénoménologie et ontologie" 397.

above, this dialectic to which attestation gives assurance is ontologically rooted in two different modes of being. Sameness is linked to an ontology of being as substance. Ipseity or selfhood must be linked to the ontology of being as act/potency.

Ricoeur, however, does not follow Heidegger all the way. He takes exception to the translation by Heidegger (and by such current authors as Manfred Riedel,⁶⁰ Franco Volpi,⁶¹ and Jacques Taminiaux⁶²) of Aristotle's *energeia* as facticity.⁶³ For Ricoeur, facticity does not sufficiently express Being as *energeia*. For this reason he translates Being, as he had done in his earlier works,⁶⁴ by Spinoza's *conatus*. Spinoza's *conatus* he understands as the desire and effort to be, or "the effort through which each thing applies itself to persevere in existence."⁶⁵ Aristotle's *dynamis/energeia* is best seen, he believes, as "a ground at once actual and in potentiality."⁶⁶ Spinoza's *conatus* expresses being as act and potency more clearly than facticity, because for Spinoza this effort to persevere in existence is of the very essence of a thing. For Ricoeur, it is attestation that gives witness to the fecundity of this ontology of act/potency.

Being as act/potency allows Ricoeur also to enroot the other dialectic of the self: the self and the other. Selfhood cannot be thought without alterity, the other in the experience of my own body, in the experience of intersubjective relationships, and in the experience of the indebtedness of existence (conscience). Beyond becoming, being must also encompass otherness. That means being includes passivity: all the experiences in which the self is forbidden to occupy the place of foundation.⁶⁷ The self can attest to itself only in a broken manner because the experiences are disparate. Passivity, like action, is polysemic. In this manner Ricoeur's tentative ontology of act/potency seeks to serve as the ground for attestation and for the self.⁶⁸

Attestation as the projecting forward of the self toward its ownmost possibilities has close links, according to Ricoeur, to testimony or wit-

⁶⁰ Manfred Riedel, *Für eine zweite Philosophie*.

⁶¹ Franco Volpi, *Heidegger e Aristotele* (Padua: Daphni, 1984).

⁶² *Lectures de l'ontologie fondamentale: Essais sur Heidegger* (Grenoble: Jérôme Milon, 1989).

⁶³ *Faktizität* is the earliest term Heidegger uses for ontology. It expresses the givenness of reality (*es gibt*). In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger uses the term *Befindlichkeit*, the situatedness of Being.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., "Démystifier l'accusation," in *Le conflit des interprétations* (Paris: Seuil, 1969) 342.

⁶⁵ *Oneself as Another* 316.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 315.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 318.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 297–356. See also, "L'Attestation" 398–403.

ness. Like Luther's "Here I stand, I can do no other," attestation operates out of a conviction, tinged in our time with suspicion, which remains desirous of the good life. Testimony refers to "words, works, actions, and to the lives which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience and history which nonetheless transcend experience and history," that is, to an "original affirmation of the absolute."⁶⁹ Attestation links the witness and the conviction: it is the self enjoined and challenged to be the bearer of a promise or a hope. But philosophy cannot cross the broad ditch from the idea of the absolute to the investment of a moment of history with an absolute character. Christian theology does. Ricoeur ends his book on an ironic note which leaves open the philosophical question whether the other who endebts or enjoins the self is a real Other or an empty place.⁷⁰

TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur has provided a reconstruction or refiguration of the ontological ground of human selfhood and action which I believe will help towards an understanding of theology as practical. There are a number of current approaches to theology that favor the practical: for example, the branch of theology known as "practical" or "pastoral" theology, Liberation Theology in its various stripes, and J. B. Metz's "political" theology. It is not feasible at this point to enter into a detailed discussion regarding the configuration of such a practical theology.⁷¹ Allow me, however, to make a few points of a fundamental theological nature. In his proposal for a "political theology," J. B. Metz indicates three themes/tasks of a practical theology⁷² which correspond quite closely to Ricoeur's traits of a practical philosophy. Metz's tasks are (1) to vindicate the primacy of praxis, (2) to assert the human subject as a primarily nonprivate, nontranscendental bearer of responsibility for action, and (3) to insert a temporal

⁶⁹ As a philosopher Ricoeur has not shied away from the question of God or the absolute. See also his "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 119-20.

⁷⁰ *Oneself as Another* 355.

⁷¹ The reports of the ongoing seminar on practical theology of the Catholic Theological Society of America from 1984 onwards are highly instructive in this regard. Practical theology has been defined as pastoral (Farley, Lapsey), as a dimension of theological ethics (Browning), as actions of the pastor (Oden), as actions which constitute the Church (Rahner, Kinast), and as the science of and for pastoral action (Nadeau). See the *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, ed. George Kilcourse, vols. 38-46, 1984-1991.

⁷² See e.g., *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980).

dimension by evoking a narrative theology of the dangerous remembrance of the suffering of the historically vanquished. I will make some comments on these three themes/tasks and indicate how Ricoeur's practical philosophy could contribute to a deepening of a practical theology. A practical theology along these lines will be (1) hermeneutical, (2) self- or identity-oriented, and (3) narrative.

Theological Hermeneutics as Practical Theology

In the wake of the foundering of metaphysics in the twentieth century came the recognition of the end of onto-theology, the theology which received its scientific standing through a reliance upon the analogy of being. Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century and young Heidegger in the twentieth insisted that theology ought to relinquish its desire for conceptual tranquility and revert to following the "factual" experience of life.⁷³ Heidegger saw Christianity not as a body of contents but as a performance. Christian faith, in his view, derives its significance not from its contents but from the "factual" experience of life. If Christian faith is itself an experience of life, theology, as understanding of faith, must retain a form which does not dissolve this factual experience. Heidegger found Augustine's *Confessions* a good example of such a theology in terms of factual life. As a narrative of Augustine's life it operates at the level of performance. It tells how Augustine came to be who he was from the perspective of his conversion. The interstices of the narrative open up the framework for Augustine's most effective theology.

A similar performative structure can be found in the Bible. Both Testaments are dominated by the narrative genre. This dominance is muted somewhat by the relationship of narrative to other nonnarrative biblical genres such as legislation, prophetic oracles, and sapiential texts.⁷⁴ Since the function of narrative is to imitate or configure action, the Bible's narrative sections, which are in constant intertextual dialogue with the nonnarrative approaches to the naming of God, have

⁷³ S. Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. Walther Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University, 1946). For Heidegger, see the analysis of his lectures given at Freiburg in the winter semester of 1920–21 entitled "Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Religion" and "Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus," in Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, tr. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber, *Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1987) 24–34.

⁷⁴ See Ricoeur's understanding of the interaction of the biblical genres as underlying biblical revelation in "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977) 1–38.

the divine-human interaction as their theme.⁷⁵ This primacy of the biblical narrative with its figure of the divine-human interaction means that no amount of theological conceptualization should be allowed to erase this underlying theme. The term "practical" as applied to theology would insist that the primary analogue is action rather than substantive identity or being.

Once primacy is assigned to action, there need not be as much dichotomy between practical theology and theory as in some of the current proposals for practical theology and even Liberation Theology. Liberation theologies, quite correctly, refuse to understand praxis as flowing out of a previously established speculative theology. Their insistence upon the primacy of action, generally called "praxis," means a primacy of involvement or commitment to liberative practices, to doing rather than thinking. Praxis, the doing of and commitment to liberative practices, is perceived as the foundation of theory, so that praxis sublates theory.⁷⁶ In a similar manner, current theories of practical theology move from an undifferentiated praxis to transformed praxis mediated by theory.⁷⁷ Praxis in each case is perceived as being in mortal conflict with theory. Ricoeur's approach to action demonstrates that this fear of contamination is unjustified. His ontology of action/passion is a much more radical sublation of the theory-practice debate. Action is grounded in a proper ontology and does not require another ground. This insight seems intuitive to those who claim the primacy of praxis, but by refusing to ground action in an ontology (probably understood as an ontology of substantive being) they condemn human action to operate in a void. A practical theology that would utilize Ricoeur's practical philosophy would be a new type of onto-theology, not based on the being of substance but on the being of activity and passivity. Such a theology would take the form of a hermeneutics.⁷⁸ The first phase of such a practical theology would not be raw unmediated praxis, but an elaboration of the preconceptual schemata of human action into lin-

⁷⁵ See the informative analysis of biblical narrative by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

⁷⁶ D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 69.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Camil Ménard, "L'urgence d'une théologie pratique nord-américaine comme théorie critique de l'agir chrétien au service de la société," *Seul ou avec les autres?: Le salut chrétien à l'épreuve de la solidarité*, Actes de 28e congrès de la Société canadienne de théologie tenu à Montréal du 26 au 27 octobre 1991, Héritage et Projet 48, ed. Jean-Claude Petit et Jean-Claude Breton (Montréal: Fides, 1992) 297-318.

⁷⁸ Ricoeur develops this at some length in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975) 257-313.

guistic and symbolic cultural figurations.⁷⁹ In other words, it would seek to understand the substructure of human and Christian living as action. It is in relation to this, what Ricoeur calls prefiguration of action, that the Judaeo-Christian textual and living resources can be introduced in order that the Christian project can be realized. Its main thrust will be performance (not only ethics). The more conceptual, speculative dimension of theology is not excluded but demanded by the very nature of the Bible and its reception. But it would clearly be a second- or third-order discourse.

Practical Theology and Identity

Ricoeur characterizes this practical philosophy as a hermeneutics of the self⁸⁰ and presents it as operative between the exalted subject of the Cartesian tradition and the shattered subject of Nietzsche and Deconstructionism. J. B. Metz's practical or political theology seeks to liberate Christian faith from the private, Enlightenment, or bourgeois subject to a social and historical subject. Ricoeur, I believe, can bring some important nuances to Metz's understanding of the human subject through his understanding of human selfhood. Ricoeur too wants to supersede the bourgeois transcendental subject by trying to uncover the dialectic process of ipseity and sameness in which the self is identified in the fragility of the kept word. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is itself mediated by action. It creates a clearer link between the self and personal identity and action. For a Latin American Liberation Christology this insight could help resolve its aporetic relationship to classical Christology. As Jon Sobrino acknowledges, liberation Christology has great difficulty incorporating the debate concerning the divine-human identity of Jesus (the Chalcedonian formulation) into its central thrust toward the praxis of liberation emanating from the historical Jesus.⁸¹ Placed in the history-like narrative context of the Gospels, the identity of Jesus is a factor of the narrative text. It is a function of narrative to shape identities, personal and communal. The Gospels shape this identity of Jesus by building on the underlying historical traces to create a narrative of the immanent coming of God's decisive activity which calls forth controversy and opposition culmi-

⁷⁹ In his article "The Model of a Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," Ricoeur had insisted that meaningful action had traits analogous to the linguistic text. Accordingly action is considered as meaningful when it is expressed or intercepted by human language.

⁸⁰ *Oneself as Another* 15.

⁸¹ See, e.g., J. Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987).

nating in the violent death of Jesus. The various devices used to shape the narrative identity of Jesus form the total figure of Jesus. This figure of Jesus, a parable of God, becomes the point of the gospel narrative. In this context, the narration of the praxis of Jesus and the identity of Jesus are correlated.⁸² This issue aside, Ricoeur's refined approach to the human self can greatly help to deepen our understanding of the self shaped by the faithful word, the kept word, of God. The self that emerges in the hearing of God's word is the self of faith, or, as Ricoeur has observed a number of times,⁸³ the self of hope, the self that is given and configured in the promise of God's fidelity. The self shaped by hope is not the absolute subject of action, nor the privatized individual of Enlightenment ideology, but the liberated self free to live in the generosity of God. Hence, in the words of Bernard Lonergan, "the Christian Church is a process of self-constitution, a *Selbstvollzug*."⁸⁴ The self which emerges in the worship of God in the liturgy of the Church is a "sujet convoqué," a self configured by a prophetic vocation. This self is not an isolated self but a self responding to a call within a community, or, to put it in other terms, a self "coram Deo" in the obedience of faith.⁸⁵

Practical Theology as Narrative Theology

Such a practical theology is not only hermeneutical but also narrative. Narrative is the most appropriate theatre of human action, because through the activity of emplotment it is able to imitate (in the Aristotelian sense of "creatively produced") human action. If practical theology is to remain faithful to factual experience, it must be able to unify "components as widely divergent as circumstances encountered while unsought, agents of actions and those who passively undergo them, accidental confrontations or expected ones, interactions which place the actors in relations ranging from conflict to cooperation, means that are well attuned to ends or less so, and, finally, results that were not willed."⁸⁶ But narratives for Ricoeur are also the space where the human experience of time is inscribed and made accessible: "Time

⁸² P. Ricoeur, "Postface: L'Identité narrative," in P. Bühler and J. Habermacher, eds., *La Narration: Quand le récit devient communication*, Lieux théologiques 12 (Génève: Labor et Fides, 1988) 287–300.

⁸³ See, e.g., his "Freedom in the Light of Hope," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1974) 402–24.

⁸⁴ *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 363.

⁸⁵ P. Ricoeur, "Le sujet convoqué: A l'école des récits de vocation prophétique" 97.

⁸⁶ P. Ricoeur, "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Maril J. Valdés (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1991) 426.

becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative model.⁸⁷ A practical theology as a narrative theology will remain attentive to the ordinary temporal structures of the story of Israel, Jesus, and the early Church. That is the intuition of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theodramatics. He approached the aporia of the goodness and justice of God in the face of the free activity of humans by retaining the narrative account of the cross and the self-gift of the Son. Similarly, J. B. Metz's political theology insists that the narrative be introduced to complete the practical.⁸⁸ Praxis requires the narrative because the bourgeois subject has lost the memory of the past. The narrative is to reach back into history and to recall another history than that of the absolute and dominant subject. For Metz, this is the history of the vanquished, which is to act as a dangerous memory to the praxis of domination of the bourgeois subject.⁸⁹ If theology is not itself a narrative, a telling of stories, it can, as the Scriptures do already in an incipient way, "elaborate the horizon of meaning implicit in the narratives and symbols constitutive of the Jewish and Christian traditions."⁹⁰ Metz perceives the narratives only as "completing" the practical. For Ricoeur the narrative does more than complete the practical. It is, at its very core, an imitation of action, a *mimesis praxeos*, as well as an evocation of our debt to the dead. In his reflections on biblical hermeneutics the narrative is shown to be the foundational genre that provides the basic, although not exclusive, framework for biblical theology. It is in and through the interaction of the narrative genre with the other biblical genres that Ricoeur weaves his agenda for theology.⁹¹ This approach sees narratology as an explanatory mediation in the praxis of liberation.

CONCLUSION

Such a practical theology can make room for the speculative questions of traditional systematic theology. The narrative calls for the speculative. The ontological vehemence that generated the narrative

⁸⁷ *Time and Narrative* 1.52.

⁸⁸ "Erlösung und Emanzipation," *Stimmen der Zeit* 191 (1973) 171–84.

⁸⁹ The same critique can be addressed to Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. A very good example of a narrative theology which has retained a speculative moment can be found in Raymund Schwager, *Jesus im Heilsdrama: Entwurf einer biblischer Erlösungslehre*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 29 (Innsbruck, Vienna: Tyrolia, 1990).

⁹⁰ P. Ricoeur, "De moeilijke weg naar een narratieve theologie," *Meedenken met Edward Schillebeeckx* (Baarn: Nelissen, 1983) 80.

⁹¹ See e.g., "Naming God," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979) 215–28, and "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977) 1–38.

seeks the concept. It explores the resemblances and the discordant concordances and, instead of basking in the differences, seeks to exploit them with its own resources in order to bring them within the realm of the conceptual or the speculative. But speculative theology remains second-level discourse and is forever referred back to its original discourse.⁹² In this manner I believe a good case can be made for a practical theology that is postfoundationalist and yet ontologically grounded. It would be practical without refusing an analytical moment. The current thrust toward a new practical philosophy using the temporal categories of Heidegger could give a new impetus and status to the efforts toward a renewed practical theology.

⁹² See Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* 257–314.